NC STATE College of Design

FINAL PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

(to be submitted with digital copy of final project)

SECTION A:

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Major: Art + Design

Minor or concentration:

SECTION B: Project Abstract:

This project makes use of different storytelling techniques such as film, motion graphics, and illustrations. These stories will focus on three cornerstones that shape the foundation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Academic Excellence, Community, and Culture. The objective of this project is to illustrate and educate young students who may be unfamiliar with the purpose of Historically Black Colleges and Universities and why they are still being utilized in modern day education past their initial founding. By no means is this a defense for their relevance but a showcase of how HBCUs help shape and prepare students, particularly students of color, to receive a high level education.

SECTION C:

Project Document:

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NC STATE College of Design

COLLEGE OF DESIGN FINAL PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

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The written documentation will consists of, at least, the following:

1. Title page including: student's name, department's name, college, university, date of submission, degree name, committee names with chair indicated.
2. Abstract, approximately 100 words, describing the project.
3. Table of contents.
4. List of illustrations.
5. Report text.
6. Footnotes/endnotes.
7. Bibliography, using standard form.

HBCUs: A Considersion

By Elijah Umrani

HBCUs: A Considersion

By Elijah Umrani

Raleigh, North Carolina

Master of Art + Design in Experimental Media Arts
College of Design, North Carolina State University

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"The more you know of your history, the more liberated you are"
-Maya Angelou

Abstract

This thesis will detail the formation, explanation, and construction of this project, while also underscoring the significance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Support from some key precedents and other related disciplines will also be highlighted. This project will make use of different storytelling techniques such as film, motion graphics, and illustrations. These stories will focus on three cornerstones that shape the foundation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Academic Excellence, Community, and Culture. The objective of this project is to illustrate and educate young students who may be unfamiliar with the purpose of Historically Black Colleges and Universities and why they are still being utilized in modern day education past their initial founding. By no means is this a defense for their relevance but a showcase of how HBCUs help shape and prepare students, particularly students of color, to receive a high level education.

Background: The Narrative of HBCUs

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were established mostly after the Civil War to provide education to Black Americans during a time in which they were generally not allowed to attend college with White students. Prior to the Civil War there was no structured higher education system for black students and those few that were established provided elementary and secondary education. It was not until the 1900s that HBCUs began to offer post-secondary programs of study.

The Second Morrill Act in 1890 required racially segregated states to provide a land grant institution for black students whenever a land-grant institution was established for white students. Eventually sixteen black institutions were designated as land grants. In 1896 the Supreme Court decision in Plessy established the “separate but equal” educational system. By 1953, 32,000 students were enrolled in black private universities and 43,000 in public black colleges. However In 1954 the US Supreme Court decision in Brown vs Board of Education rejected the “separate but equal” doctrine, but it took the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to provide a mechanism ensuring equal opportunity. Nineteen states were operating racially segregated higher education systems when this was enacted. The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines HBCUs as an accredited higher education institution established prior to 1964 whose "principal mission was, and is, the education of black Americans."

Currently, 107 HBCUs serve more than 228,000 students throughout the country. These schools operate as both public and private entities. Alabama is the state with the most historically black institutions in the nation with fourteen, followed by North Carolina with twelve institutions; ten being active. Georgia and Texas tying with nine, South Carolina with eight, Louisiana with seven, Mississippi and Tennessee with six, Virginia with five Arkansas, Florida, and Maryland with four, the District of Columbia with three Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio , Pennsylvania, and West Virginia with two, and finally Delaware, Oklahoma, and Virgin Islands housing a single campus with their territories. (Nichols 2022) Although Alabama is the state with the most HBCUs, North Carolina has the most black undergraduate student enrollment for these institutions. While HBCUs historically served Black students exclusively, nearly a quarter of students enrolled in HBCUs were non-Black as of 2019.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities in North Carolina

- Shaw University (1865)
- Barber-Scotia College (1867)
- Johnson C. Smith University (1867)
- Fayetteville State University (1867)
- Saint Augustine's University (1867)
- Bennett College (1873)
- Livingstone College (1879)
- Kittrell College (1886-1975)
- Elizabeth City State University (1891)
- North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (1891)
- Winston-Salem State University (1892)
- North Carolina Central University (1910)

Significance: HBCU Setting

Making the transition from an HBCU (Historically Black College or University) to a PWI (Predominately White Institution) setting was enlightening to me, because the roles of being the majority on campus had switched. The campus of NC State was lively, but to me it felt like something was missing. The campus was much larger, and active than Winston Salem State's campus, but Winston felt like a gathering of black culture, and an open invitation to express yourself to the fullest. This doesn't imply that NC State isn't capable of being the same way, or that the University has to cater to students of color, but it would be nice if the university could find a way to replicate the same feeling as WSSU.

This helped me appreciate the significance of going to an Historically Black College, and how others could benefit from these institutions. This is by no means a push to gain more attendance to HBCUs, but more of a way to add awareness that these institutions can be an alternative college education, and a way to understand the functions and impacts of these institutions. This project will also highlight three important elements that make up these institutions with the goal of establishing a shared understanding and appreciation of HBCUs.

My Story

In 2014 I was struggling to find a university to pursue a B.A in Animation. There were schools that offered the programs but I was an above average student at best. Most of the “big” schools required higher S.A.T and A.C.T scores. Eventually I was introduced to Winston-Salem State University through a church basketball trip. My first visit was a pleasant one, I got to see more people of color in an environment that I was used to seeing to be more predominantly white. It wasn’t until I went to the game where the university band was involved that helped me finalize my decision. Known as the “Red Sea of Sound” Marching Band, they brought the game to life with their music. The crowd became more involved every time they played. I was part of the high school marching band at the time, but the school population was predominantly white, and the playing style wasn’t the same. At the time, I thought the music we were playing was what got the crowd going.

After putting in my application and gaining my acceptance letter, I continued to attend the church basketball trips, while taking as many notes as I could whenever the band was there. At the last home game for the season, I decided to introduce myself to the acting band director at the time, who then introduced me to the “Band Splash” event. At this event, high school students are able to practice and perform with the band for the day on campus. This is when I got to fully experience what HBCU culture was like before becoming a student. Many of the stereotypes I had heard about HBCUs were misconceptions. Most of all, I felt comfortable and confident in that environment. For 9 long hours, I got to experience the one thing I never got to experience at my highschool, black culture, and black love.

High School graduation could not come soon enough for me, and when I finally walked across that stage, I was one step closer to walking back onto that campus, not as a visitor, but as a student. Although I mainly went there for the art program, what I got out of my academic experience was the wonders and celebration of black culture, life lessons, and lifelong brotherhood amongst my friends.

Saying that my freshman year was overwhelming would be an understatement. I moved into my dorm room early Sunday morning and was welcomed by a friendly move in staff which consisted of faculty members, student athletes, and some fraternity / sorority members. Once I moved in I had a short tour of the campus of Winston Salem State by one of my mother's co-workers, who was an alumni of the university and also the person that recommended the university to me. Fast forward to the first day of student orientation: my group was surprisingly made up of current and former members of the Red Sea of Sound Marching, which I was a proud member of myself. We went over the rich histories and traditions of the university, including the school's mission statement "*Enter to Learn, Depart to Serve*"

One of the most important traditions of the University was the walking of the archway. This is when the Lamb becomes the Ram, or in other words the individual "*enters to learn*" This day is very important to the university next to the homecoming day. An entire ceremony is held with the Chancellor and other upper level members of the university encouraging students to be as scholarly as they can, and push themselves academically and spirituality for their eventual *departure* to serve the community. This was not the only motto that influenced my studies however. The Red Sea of Sound also had a pledge that they continuously followed. Not only were they the University's Marching Band, they were also "*Ambassadors of goodwill*" In my mind the band served as emissaries of the university, exposing the excellence that the university offered to future rams and supporters alike. *All members of The "Red Sea of Sound" Marching Band have pledged to serve as ambassadors of goodwill for Winston-Salem State University presenting themselves as a showcase of musical excellence, elegance, sophistication, esprit de corp, and dignity. (*Dr. Michael Magruder Director of Bands 2007*)*

For four life changing years, I served as a member of the Red Sea of Sound and learned about the rich history of music, and also about how to conduct myself in the classroom and outside the halls of academics. This isn't to say I didn't know how to be professional before college, I was raised to be respectful and to carry myself honorably. Going to an HBCU however made me realize that not everyone has had the luxury as I did. Some men in the band didn't own suits, or knew how to tie a tie. Dr. Magruder, who was the director of bands and departmental head at the time, often took time out of our practices to give out life lessons that pertained to our

performance and our daily lives. If you didn't own a suit going into the university, he would make sure that you did at the end of your time there.

It was these experiences that helped build up my confidence and esteem to perform at my highest level in the classroom. Dr. Magruder in a way was like a father figure to me. He always made sure to drive me on the right path, and would always reassure me and my fellow band members that the academic process isn't easy, but it works. I only wished I could have stayed a little longer at Winston-Salem State and in the Red Sea of Sound, but I had satisfied my academic requirements to receive my degree and had to "*Depart to Serve*"

That Saturday morning I arrived at the Fine Arts building in my cap and gown, there was Dr. Magruder looking at me like a proud father watching his child graduate. Prior to graduation I went to band practice a little late, and before Dr. Magruder could fuss at me, he realized that I was graduating and was confused as to why I was at practice. To be honest, after four consecutive years of band, going to practice had become second nature to me. Although I had to take a break to focus on my final exhibition project for art, once the exhibition was in the history books, I went back to being a bandsmen. He then went into detail about how in the past he would always offer the graduating seniors a chance to play at the graduation ceremony, because he played at his own ceremony since to him it would be the last time he would perform with the band at Jackson State University. Every senior ended up deciding to opt out of the performance. However, to his point that would be the last official time that I would play with the band. To his surprise I decided to stay at practice and eventually played the Recessional song at my own graduation ceremony after walking across the stage to receive my diploma.

Winston-Salem State University: Brief History

Before it was called Winston-Salem State University, this institution had a different name. It was originally founded as Slater Industrial Academy in 1892. It began in a one-room frame structure with 25 pupils and one teacher. In 1895 the school was recognized by the State of North Carolina and in 1899 it was chartered by the state as Slater Industrial and Slater Normal School. In 1925, the General Assembly of North Carolina recognized the school's curriculum above high school, changed its name to Winston-Salem Teachers College and empowered it under authority of the State Board of Education to confer appropriate degrees. Winston-Salem Teachers College thus became the first black institution in the nation to grant degrees for teaching in the elementary grades.

The School of Nursing was established in 1953 and awards graduates the bachelor of science degree. In 1963 the North Carolina General Assembly authorized changing the name from Winston-Salem Teachers College to Winston-Salem State College. A statute designating Winston-Salem State College as Winston-Salem State University received legislative approval in 1969. On October 30, 1971, the General Assembly reorganized higher education in North Carolina. On July 1, 1972, Winston-Salem State University became one of sixteen constituent institutions of the University of North Carolina subject to the control of a Board of Governors.

Since its founding in 1892, Winston-Salem State University has grown from a one-room frame structure to more than 39 buildings located on 117 acres; from one teacher to more than 400 faculty members; and from 25 pupils to a student body of more than 6,000. The university offers more than 60 programs: 45 bachelor’s degree programs; nine master’s degree programs (business administration, computer science and information technology, elementary education, English as a second language and linguistics, master of arts in teaching, occupational therapy, and rehabilitation counseling; a doctoral degree program (physical therapy); and six certificate programs (non-profit administration, family nurse practitioner, advance nurse education, add-on licensure programs in English as a second language, special education, academically/ intellectually gifted and computer programming).

From 2001-2007, U.S. News and World Report magazine has ranked Winston-Salem State University among the top regional, public, liberal arts colleges in the South in its annual "America's Best Colleges" guide.

"Our History." Our History - Winston-Salem State University, https://www.wssu.edu/about/points-of-pride/our-history.html.

Academic Excellence

In my research I have found three cornerstones that every HBCU shares. The first of these is Academic Excellence. The creation of HBCUs was not simply to provide educational opportunities but to preserve the legacy of those that came before. Thus, Black History and Culture is an important part of the main curriculum.

HBCUs have introduced many influential graduates to society such as Thurgood Marshall; an American lawyer and civil rights activist who served as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States from October 1967 until October 1991. Marshall was the

Court's first African-American justice.

Fig1: Image of Thurgood Marshall

Kamala Harris an American politician and attorney who is the 49th and current vice president of the United States.First female vice president and the highest-ranking female official in U.S. history, as well as the first African American and first Asian American vice president. Both Thurgood Marshall and Vice President Kamala Harris attended Howard University.

Image of Kamala Harris

W.E.B.Dubois, who attended Fisk University to later become an American sociologist, socialist, historian and Pan-Africanist civil rights activist. Du Bois was also one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909.

Image of W.E.B Dubois

Katherine Johnson, who attended West Virginia State University to later become a mathematician whose calculations of orbital mechanics as a NASA employee were critical to the success of the first and subsequent U.S. crewed spaceflights.

Image of Katherine Johnson

Community

HBCUs offer more than academics. HBCUs are mainly made of people of color, making their environment tailored to those who they serve. Many of the students share similar backgrounds and cultural experiences. This is best expressed through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs where we can get a better understanding on how community plays a role at these institutions.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. From the bottom of the pyramid upwards the needs are: physiological (food and clothing), safety (job security), love / belonging needs (friendship), esteem, and self-actualization.

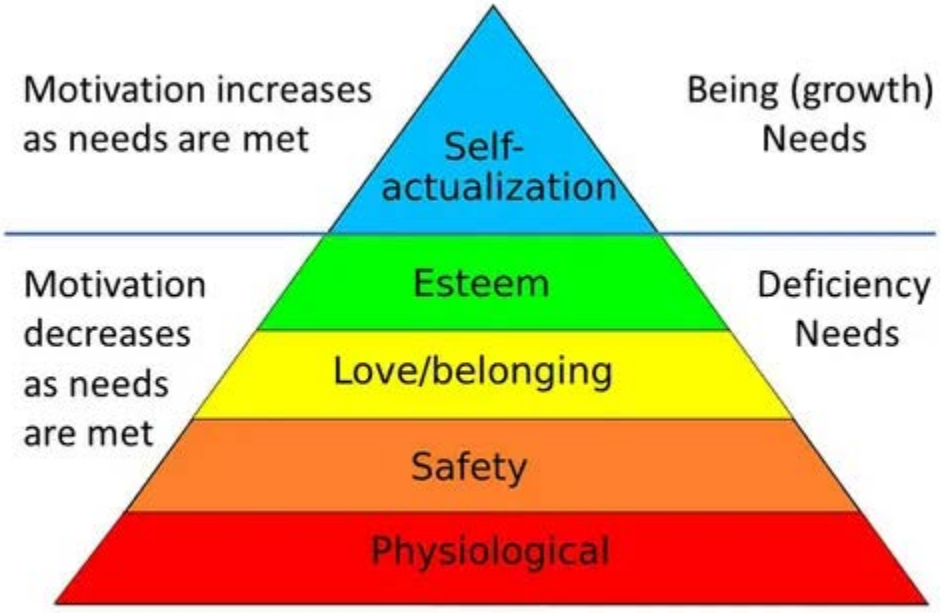

Fig 5: Diagram of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

This diagram can be directly applied to how HBCUs cater to their student base. One can argue that some of the listed benefits can also be applied to Predominantly White Institutions. However, the feeling of safety and a sense of belonging in an environment that encourages someone to come as they are, where all can gain esteem through fellowship, is easier to achieve in an environment where mutual goals and objectives are culturally aligned.

Physiological

- Safe to assume that all public / private university types satisfy the Physiological Need to some degree

Safety

- HBCUs offer a safe environment where the students are free to explore their identities without the need of being questioned.

Love / Belonging

- Inclusiveness is one of the main elements of campus life at an HBCU.
- Easy to connect with students and faculty who share similar backgrounds
- Uplifting through fellowship

Esteem

- Builds off of the Love / Belonging
- Preparation for Professionalism
- Students, Faculty, and Alumnus work together

Self-Actualization

- All of this leads to Self-Actualization, which is built off of the previous foundational pieces

A few community influencers who graduated from HBCUs include Rev. Jesse Jackson, an American political activist, Baptist minister, and politician. He was a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988 and served as a shadow U.S. senator for the District of Columbia from 1991 to 1997. He founded Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) a Chicago-based organization in which he advocated Black self-help and achieved a broad audience for his liberal views. He attended North Carolina Agricultural and

Technical State University.

Fig 6: Image of Jesse Jackson

John Lewis who was an American politician and civil rights activist who served in the United States House of Representatives for Georgia's 5th congressional district from 1987 until his death in 2020. He was the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee from 1963 to 1966. Lewis was one of the "Big Six" leaders of groups who organized the 1963 March

on Washington. He fulfilled many key roles in the civil rights movement and its actions to end legalized racial segregation in the United States. He attended Fisk University.

Fig 7: Image of John Lewis

Stacey Abrams was an American politician, lawyer, voting rights activist, and author who served in the Georgia House of Representatives from 2007 to 2017, serving as minority leader from 2011 to 2017. She was also the first African-American woman to deliver a response to the State of the Union address. She Founded the Fair Fight Organization, which was created to address the issues of voter suppression. She attended Spelman College.

Fig 8: Image of Stacey Abrams

Culture

HBCU traditions create a bridge between the past and the future, celebrating and uplifting Black culture and history through pride, pageantry, and meaningful rituals. Homecoming for

example, is an academic celebration and the gathering of both the past and present students of the university. These events commonly involve sports events, a battle of the bands, cookouts, institutional ceremonies, school pageants, meet and greets between the alumni and students, which oftentimes lead to networking opportunities.

There are also the various divine nine Greek organizations that conduct their own traditions throughout the institutions. At the start of the 20th century, a small number of Black students came together from mainly Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to form their own sororities and fraternities. These organizations are known collectively as the National Pan-Hellenic Council or the “Divine Nine”. Each of these organizations were established with unique core values but shared a common goal: to educate and uplift the Black community from racial inequities. There are five fraternities and four sororities that make up the Divine Nine. The fraternities are: Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, Iota Phi Theta. The Sororities that make up the Divine Nine are: Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, Sigma Gamma Rho.

Fig 9: The Nine Black Greek letter Organizations that make up the Divine Nine Brianna Milord

Alpha Phi Alpha was the first intercollegiate Greek-letter fraternity established for African American Men, founded on December 4th 1906 at Cornell University. The fraternity initially served as a study and support group for minority students who faced racial prejudice, both educationally and socially, at Cornell. The seven founding members and early leaders of the fraternity succeeded in laying a firm foundation for Alpha Phi Alpha’s principles of scholarship,

fellowship, good character, and the uplifting of humanity. Since its establishment, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. has supplied voice and vision to the struggle of African Americans and people of color around the world. Notable members include Jesse Owens: competed in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin and won four gold medals. Dr. Martin Luther King: an American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesman and leader in the civil rights movement from 1955 until his assassination in 1968. Stuart Scott: an American sportscaster and anchor on ESPN, most notably on SportsCenter, just to name a few.

Alpha Kappa Alpha would be later established on the campus of Howard University on January 15th 1908 by nine college students. Their mission was to cultivate, and encourage high scholastic and ethical standards, to promote unity and friendship among college women, to study and help alleviate problems concerning girls and women in order to improve their social status, to maintain a progressive interest in college life, and to be a service to all mankind. Notable members include Toni Morrison: an American novelist, Nobel and Pulitzer prize-winning author. The critically acclaimed Song of Solomon brought her national attention and won the National Book Critics Circle Award. Bernice King: American lawyer, minister, and the youngest child of civil rights leaders Martin Luther King Jr. King is also the CEO of First Kingdom Management, a Christian consulting firm based in Atlanta, Georgia. Phylicia Rashad: American actress and singer, and Inaugural Dean of the newly-established College of Fine Arts at Howard University. She is known for her role as Clair Huxtable on the NBC sitcom The Cosby Show which earned her Emmy Award nominations in 1985 and 1986. She was dubbed "The Mother of the Black Community" at the 2010 NAACP Image Awards and played Ruth Lucas on Cosby along with many more.

In chapter 4 of Dr. Beverly Tatum's book: Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the Cafeteria? She references Psychologist William Cross's model which highlights the "Psychology of Nigrescence" or the "Five stages of racial identity development" which are "pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and

Internalization-commitment". (Tatum 2017)

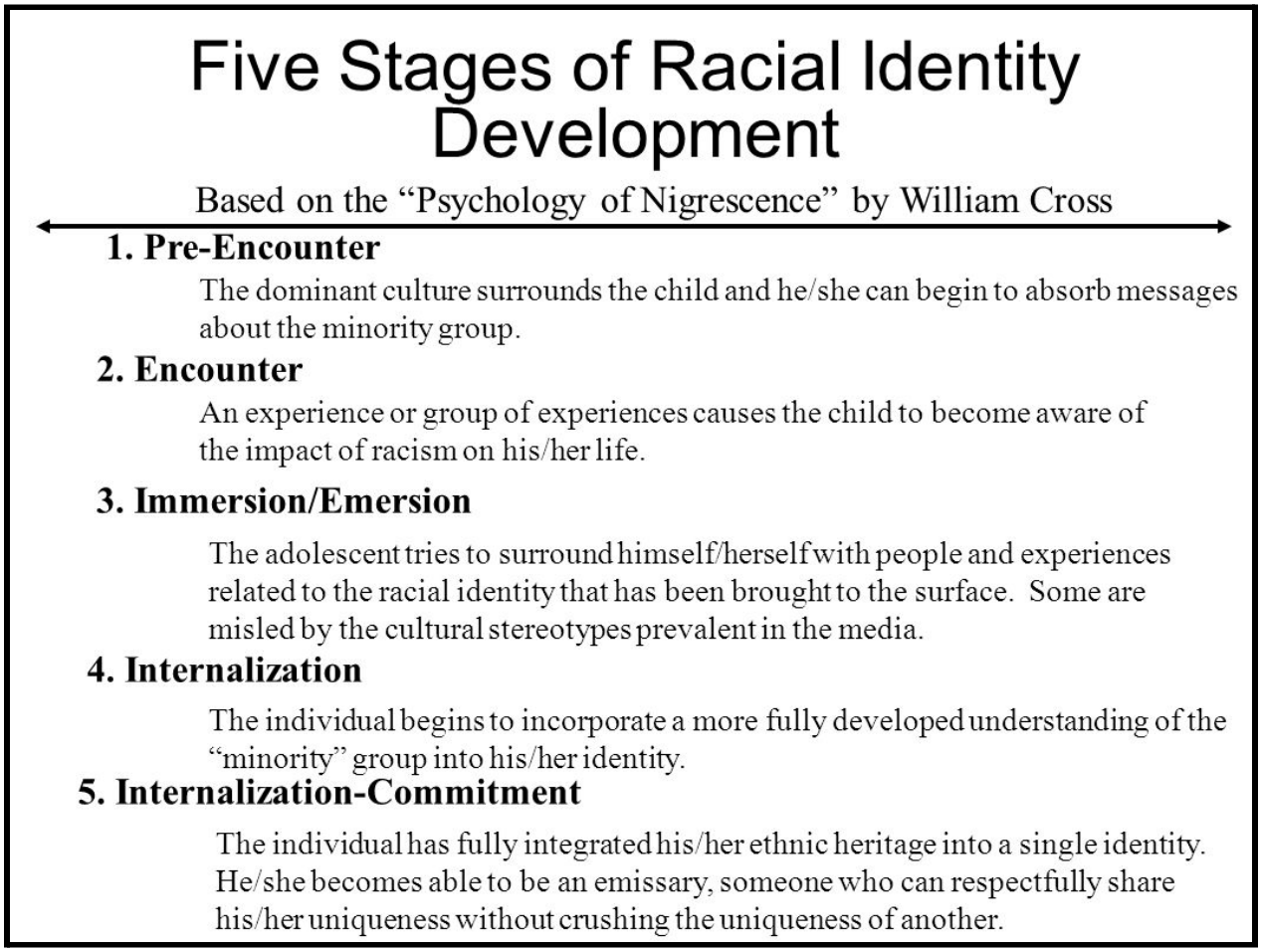

Fig 10 William Cross: Five stages of Racial Identity model

He points out in the first stage a Black child would become familiar with the values and beliefs of the more dominant white culture. This notion often leads to stereotypes that it is better to be white than it is any other culture, which is exposed to both black and white students alike.

"*On the other hand, if Black parents are what I call race-conscious—that is, actively seeking to encourage positive racial identity by providing their children with positive cultural images and messages about what it means to be Black—the impact of the dominant society's messages are reduced" (Tatum 2017)*

The Following are examples of HBCU graduates who exemplify Culture.

Spike Lee, An American film director, producer, screenwriter, actor, and professor. His production company, 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, has produced more than 35 films since 1983. He made his directorial debut with She's Gotta Have It. He attended Morehouse College.

Fig 11: Image of Spike Lee

Alice Walker, an American novelist, short story writer, poet, and social activist.

In 1982, she became the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, which she was awarded for her novel The Color Purple. She attended Spelman College.

Fig 12: Image of Alice Walker

Ruth Carter, an American costume designer for film and television, with over 40 films to her credit, who has mastered the look of multiple periods and genres in envisioning the clothing and overall appearance of a character or performer. The Films she worked on include: Selma, Do the Right Thing, and Black Panther. She attended Hampton University.

Fig 13: Image of Ruth Carter

Supporting Theories: Talented Tenth

For a while now, I believed that the philosophies of Booker T Washington and W.E.B Dubois were perfect theories to apply for my research. They were both correct despite the viewpoints they disagreed on. Booker T Washington's philosophy consists of African Americans to accept the discriminations against them for the time being, and focus on building skills and accumulating their wealth. He thought these skills would lay the foundation for the creation of stability that the African-American community required in order to move forward. He believed that in the long term, "blacks would eventually gain full participation in society by showing themselves to be responsible, reliable American citizens. (Pole 1974, p. 107.)

This theory would not be appropriate for that, which is why I believe that the philosophy of Dubois is more applicable to my project. What would be known as the Talented Tenth "The "Talented Tenth" refers to the one in ten Black men that have cultivated the ability to become leaders of the Black community by acquiring a college education, writing books, and becoming directly involved in social change. In The Talented Tenth, Du Bois argues that these college educated African American men should sacrifice their personal interests and use their education to lead and better the Black community. (Wright 2002) Though social times may be different, I firmly believe that people in the Black community should enrich themselves in education, and not necessarily sacrifice their personal interests, but bare their personal interests in mind, and use education to better themselves and the community.

Essentially that is one of the reasons HBCUs exist even today. From a previous experience, it wasn't just about getting a higher level education, it was about understanding the community that I am a part of. This ties into the next philosophy, Identity. For example: birds of a feather flock together. In nature, birds of the same species often flock together as a safety precaution, since congregating in large groups would reduce their risk of predation. This behavior of birds is where this idiom originates from. When I was growing up, I lived in Northwest Greensboro where the population was 72.1% white, and 7.2% black. Because I was so young, I gravitated towards the majority because I thought we were all the same. It wasn't until I was older that my own sense of identity came into question by my peers.

Because I adapted to the area, my white colleagues assumed I was trying to be like them, and abandoning my physical appearance and the stereotypes that came with black men. For a time, I believed the stereotypes because of the area I grew up in, and even accepted the racist comments towards me, making me accept my then false identity. For a long time I thought that I was being myself and that was my identity. Because of this I thought that I would not fit in with my fellow classmates of color. But what does this have to do with birds of a feather flock together, identity, the Talented Tenth, Booker T. Washington's philosophy, or HBCUs?

Referring back to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, I wasn't satisfied with my sense of belonging, and Esteem. My sense of safety varied from time to time, but mostly my belonging and esteem were average at best.

Choosing to go to an HBCU was one of the best decisions I made as a student and a person of color. Unlike highschool, where I was judged for how I carried myself, in college, it was the complete opposite. I was embraced for my differences, and uplifted by strangers who would turn into my friends, then turn into my brothers and sisters. I say all of this to say that, yes as a person you should carry yourself highly and pursue as much education as you can. You can compromise your work, and your dreams, but never compromise yourself in life. That is what going to an HBCU taught me. Being within my own community and like minded individuals has taught me to embrace my true self.

In Chapter Two of Beverly Daniel Tatum's: Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? : And Other Conversations About Race, She talks about the complexity of identity. *The concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts. Who am I? The answer depends in large part on who the world around me says I am. Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, store clerks? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether? As social scientist Charles Cooley pointed out long ago, other people are the mirror in which we see ourselves.* (Tatum 2017)

Identity is one of the important elements of being human. This does not just apply to people of color, Episode 5 of season 3's United Shades of America, show host W. Kamau Bell visits some famous HBCUs and learns about the rich history of the institutions from current, past students, and some professors.He encounters a group a students at Lincoln University who openly admitted they were gay, and they support the LGBTQ community.

Winston-Salem State Alumni, Stephen A. Smith reflected on his past life experiences, how he grew up poor and hungry. He points out that the systems in place were designed to marginalize people based on test scores and grades which often led to most jumping to conclusions.

"It led to the system stereotyping and marginalizing you, questioning what you could do and what you could be because your grades and SAT score are the only thing they had to indicate what your potential was. When I went to an HBCU, I was surrounded by people who looked like me, who shared my cultural identity, shared my challenges, my trials and tribulations, I didn't feel alone." (Smith 2021)

Despite these benefits, it is not always simple for people to break out of the silence and discuss the issues of systemic and academic racism. In part five of Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? Tatum discusses the consequences and negative effects of not breaking the silence..

"As a society, we pay a price for our silence. Unchallenged personal, cultural, and institutional racism results in the loss of human potential, lowered productivity, and a rising tide of fear and violence in our society. Individually, racism stifles our own growth and development. It clouds our vision and distorts our perceptions. It alienates us not only from others but also from ourselves and our own experiences." (Tatum 2017)

Connecting this back with my project. I want the viewers to understand that this may be the stories of black students, the overall theme of self identity can be applied by everyone. Just like when I asked myself "Who am I?" I hope the viewers will take the time to ask themselves the same question. Although academic racism is not as violent as it was prior to the success of the Civil Rights movement, it is still just as dangerous psychologically.

"We all have a sphere of influence. Each of us needs to find our own sources of courage so that we will begin to speak. There are many problems to address, and we cannot avoid them indefinitely. We cannot continue to be silent. We must begin to speak, knowing that words alone are insufficient. But I have seen that meaningful dialogue can lead to effective action. Change is possible." (Tatum 2017)

To summarize everything, I believe that education is a necessary means to further our goals to achieve our purposes in life. People should not be ashamed to admit who they are, what they do, and why they think the way they do. Disagreements are natural, because deep down inside everyone is different, but being different is not necessarily a bad thing. "*As social scientist Charles Cooley pointed out long ago, other people are the mirror in which we see ourselves.*" (Tatum 2017) Embracing my own identity is something I ran away from for half of my academic career. It wasn't until attending college at Winston-Salem State; an HBCU, where I began to embrace myself within my own culture and community. That is why it is important to pursue a higher education, but it is more important to accept and embrace your own identity, because in the end you are not doing it for others, but you are doing it for yourself.

Precedents

In examining the influences on my chosen topic, I find two especially important.

United Shades of America: Season 3, Episode 5

In this episode host: W. Kamau Bell visits some famous HBCUs and learns about the rich history of the institutions from current, past students, and some professors. What is interesting about this episode is that he dropped out of college, and did not attend an HBCU, because he assumed that he wouldn't fit in because of his personality. He soon learns after visiting Moore House that he would have been accepted and encouraged to embrace who he is had he attended. The way he covers the history of these historically black institutions mirrors the way I want to inform the viewers to help them make the right decisions for themselves.

Fig 14: Image of W.Kamau Bell at Morehouse

Therealkamryne

Tiktoker Therealkamryne recently made various posts about interesting facts about black history that the average student would not learn in school. The information and history she provided in her post were intentionally chosen to shine more awareness of historical figures like Mary Kenner, who created the sanitary belt which laid the foundation for what is known as the maxi pad.

Fig 15: Image of @therealkamryne

Development History

When it comes to the creation process of this project, it had many forms prior to the hybrid form it has now. Originally this was going to be an animated series focusing on fictional characters, based on some students I encountered in both undergraduate studies at Winston-Salem State and my graduate studies here at North Carolina State, under the name "*Shades of Academia*"

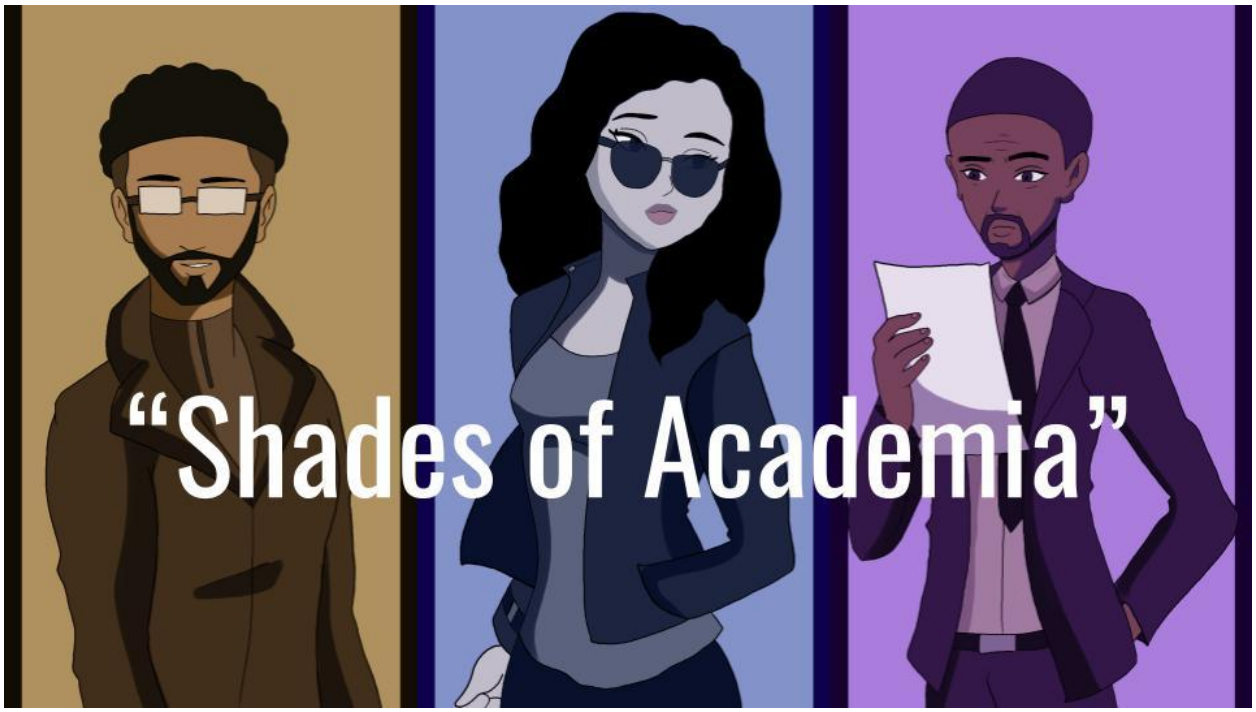

Fig 16: cover of "Shades of Academia"

This series was going to focus on the stories of a former student, current student and professor of a fictional Historically Black College or University.

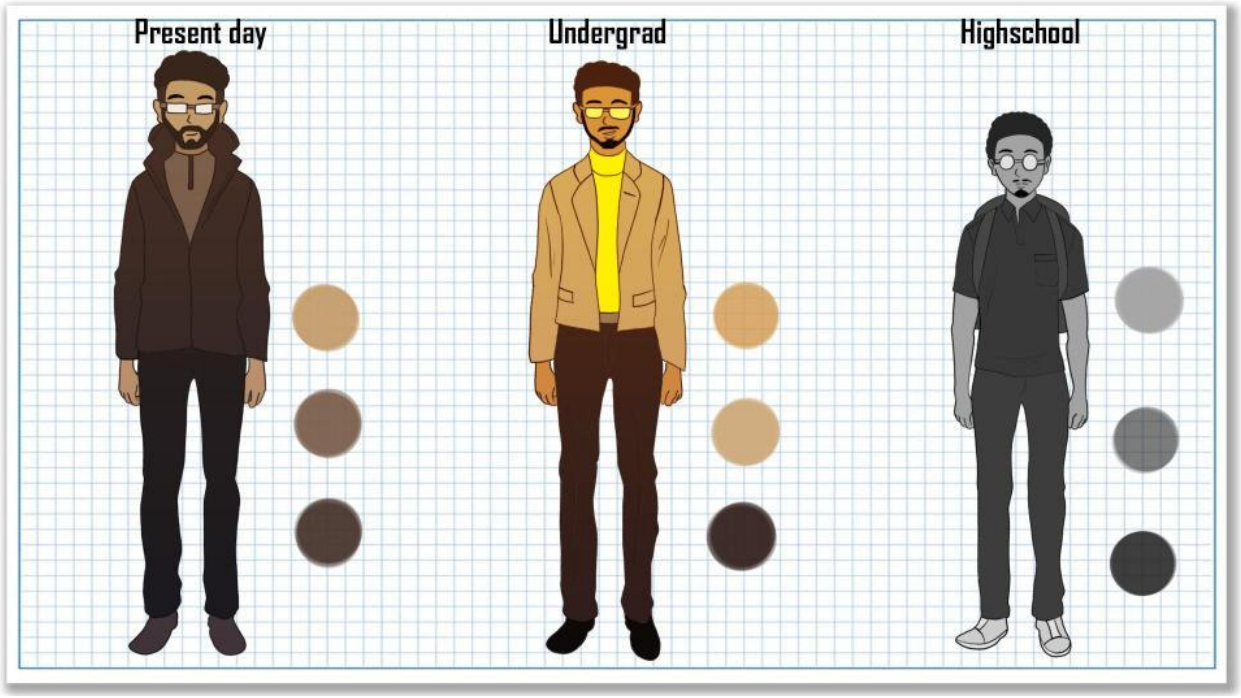

Fig 17: Concept art of Ezekiel Woods

Ezekiel Woods (left) was going to have a similar narrative to my own, and would use elements of color to drive his story from his past to his present. He was going to talk about his past highschool experience and how he felt out of place and had to take up a new identity to “fit” in. His highschool flashback would have been in greyscale to symbolize how he felt in that environment. Once he transitioned to college, it would be warm and vibrant colors to show the academic confidence he would gain.

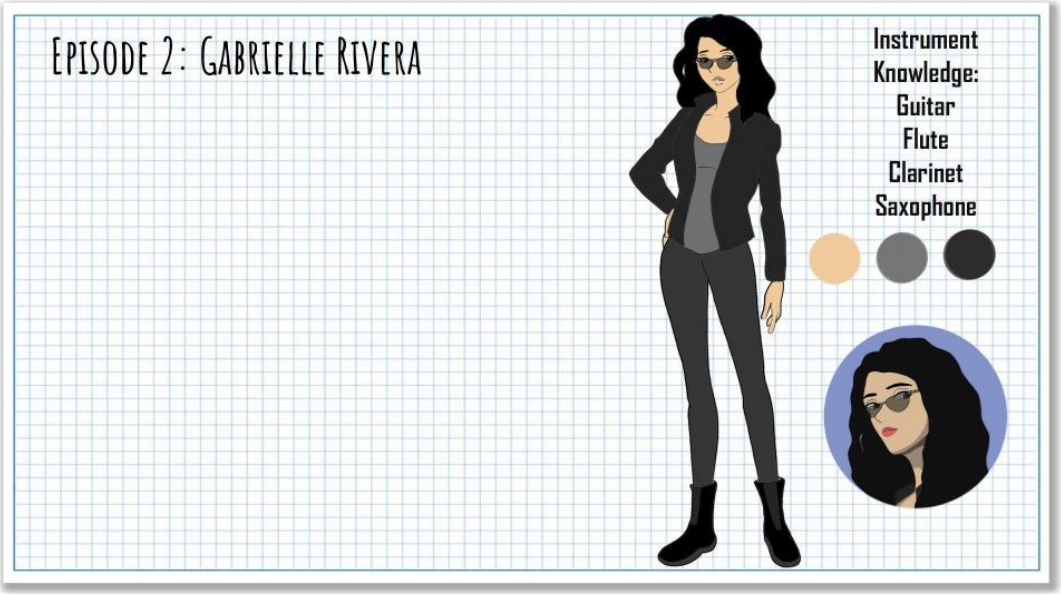

Fig 18 Concept art of Gabrielle Rivera

Gabrielle Rivera (middle) was going to be an undergraduate student who was attending the same fictional HBCU as Ezekiel, but going on a music scholarship. Her story would have focused on the inclusiveness aspect of HBCUs, and how music is a universal language for everyone to come together. She would eventually cross paths with Ezekiel practicing on the drums. Unlike Ezekiel's story being color driven, Gabrielle's story would have been audio driven with each character being symbolized by an instrument. As seen in the figure above, Gabrielle has a vast knowledge of instrumental skills ranging from Guitar (Her main instrument) Flute, Clarinet, and Saxophone.

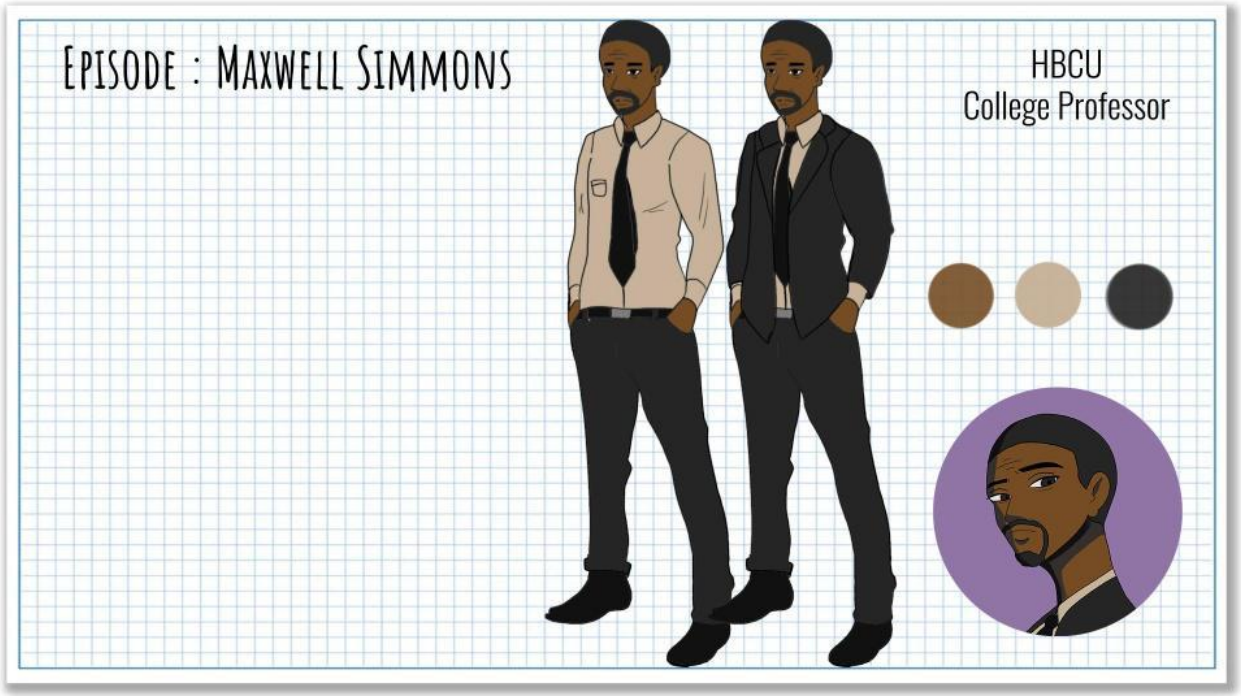

Fig 19: Concept art of Maxwell Simmons

Dr. Maxwell Simmons (right) was going to have a more informal narrative. Dr. Simmons was going to be a history professor at the university that both Ezekiel and Gabrielle attend. Dr. Simmons was based on Dr. Magruder and how he advocated for the importance of higher education and the importance of going to classes and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. He would have given different history lessons of the various institutions, the reasoning behind their establishments and why they are relevant.

Ultimately this project was going to focus on the common misconceptions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, however as previously mentioned in the beginning of this Thesis, this is not a defense for relevancy, but a showcase and underscore for these prestigious institutions of higher learning

Fig 20: HBCUs: A Conversation

After an insightful meeting with both my faculty and feedback from the various members from the college of design, The project shifted to "*HBCUs: A Consideration*" which takes the elements of "*Shades of Academia*" but incorporates footage with graphic and illustrated elements. Instead of being completely animated and fictional, it is based on true stories of HBCU students both with current and past experiences. The format was also changed to be more in line with social media stories, to help tailor to the younger targeted audience. Where the graphical elements play into this are in the form of the various edits to help the flow of the narrative.

Fig 21: Screenshots Captured from video of HBCUs: A Consideration

Process

When I was planning out the process of putting together this project, I first had to figure out what story I wanted to share. As previously mentioned earlier in the thesis, I decided to use my experience as a test run to see what direction I could go in. I wanted this project to be as informal and personal as possible, as if I was making it for myself to see when I was in highschool, looking for colleges to apply for. Though the times have changed since 2014 and there are more social media platforms, and awareness for Historical Black Colleges and Universities, some locations do not expose some of these institutions as much as others.

For example, since I grew up mainly in Greensboro, North Carolina, A&T was the HBCU I was most familiar with. I had no idea that there were other HBCUs in the state besides them, and North Carolina Central University. Since my target audience is heavily influenced by social media, I know that my time window to catch their attention will be limited.

According to Peter Suciu, Instagram was the second most used service, and it remained most popular among Gen-Z users, who spent almost 53 minutes per day, or 297 hours year; while Snapchat was also popular with the younger crowd, who racked up 50 minutes per day on the app or still 277 hours a year. In addition to social media apps, the study found that members of Gen-Z spend a shocking nine hours per day in front of a screen. Americans spent more than an average 1,300 hours on social media according to a new study from Uswitch. (Suciu 2021)

With this in mind I decided to format these videos into short videos that highlight the personal experience of the student, the university they attended, and the notable alumni that graduated from said university.

I decided to use myself as an example, because when it came to picking a university, Information about Historically Black Colleges and Universities was limited to me at the time, and I felt like my options were limited. At the time it felt like where I had one HBCU to apply to in the state, my friends had several PWIs they could apply for. It is important to know that this is only my experience and reasoning for going to an HBCU. Other students will most likely have different reasons behind why they went to an HBCU. That being said, I put together my story to a line with my experience. For future videos I will craft the stories based off of the student's experience.

Before I decided to be a visual artist, I wanted to be a musical artist. I spent a lot of time studying music. The Red Sea of Sound Marching was one of the biggest influences on my decision of attending Winston-Salem State University. Listening to the power of the brass, rhythm of drumline, and the movement of the woodwinds sparked my interest in becoming a member of the marching band. The one song that stuck out to me the most was “Get Up”. This song became one of the Universities signature songs that everyone participated in. When I first heard it I was surprised to see every section in the band doing their own thing within the song. My high school marching wasn’t nearly as lively as the Red Sea of Sound, and at that moment I wanted to be a part of the organization. I wanted to replicate the feeling of the song, while exercising my musical knowledge. Using FL Studios 10 I created the background music with the idea of acting like the song Get Up with my own personal touch of course. The thing I like about this software is that I can take advantage of my Synesthesia by color coding everything from the musical section, to the notes themselves.

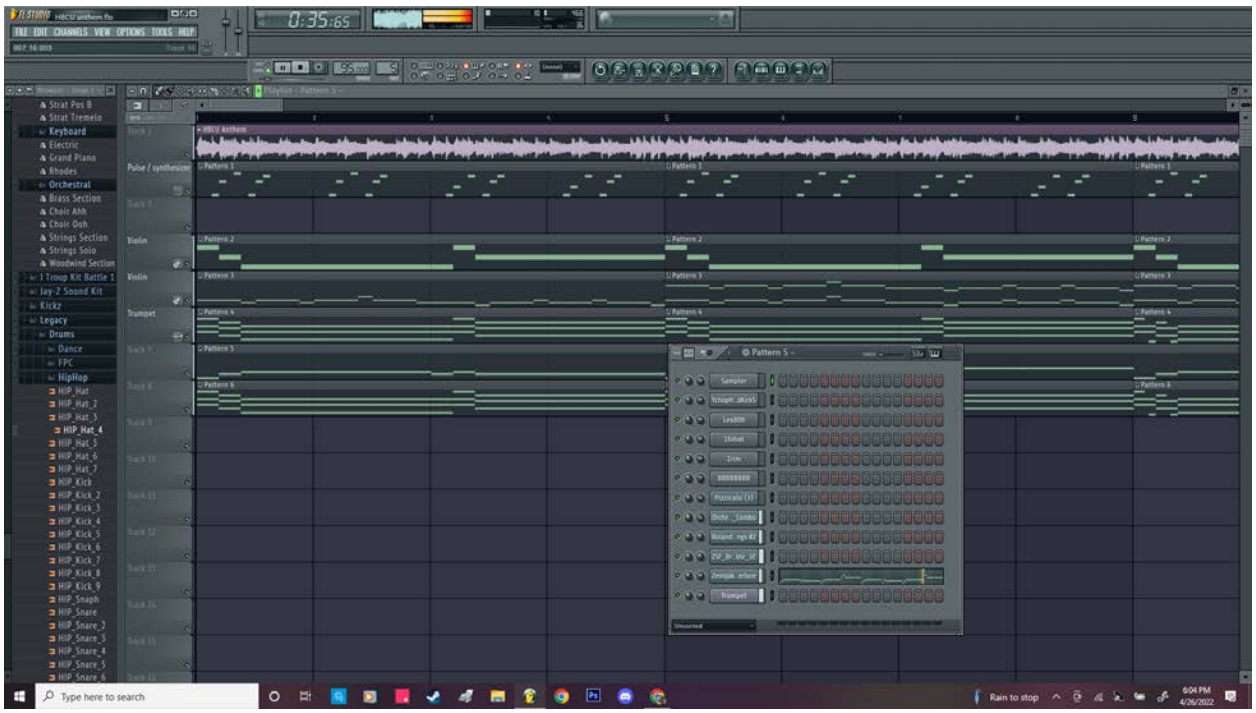

Fig 22: Audio process captured from FL Studios 10

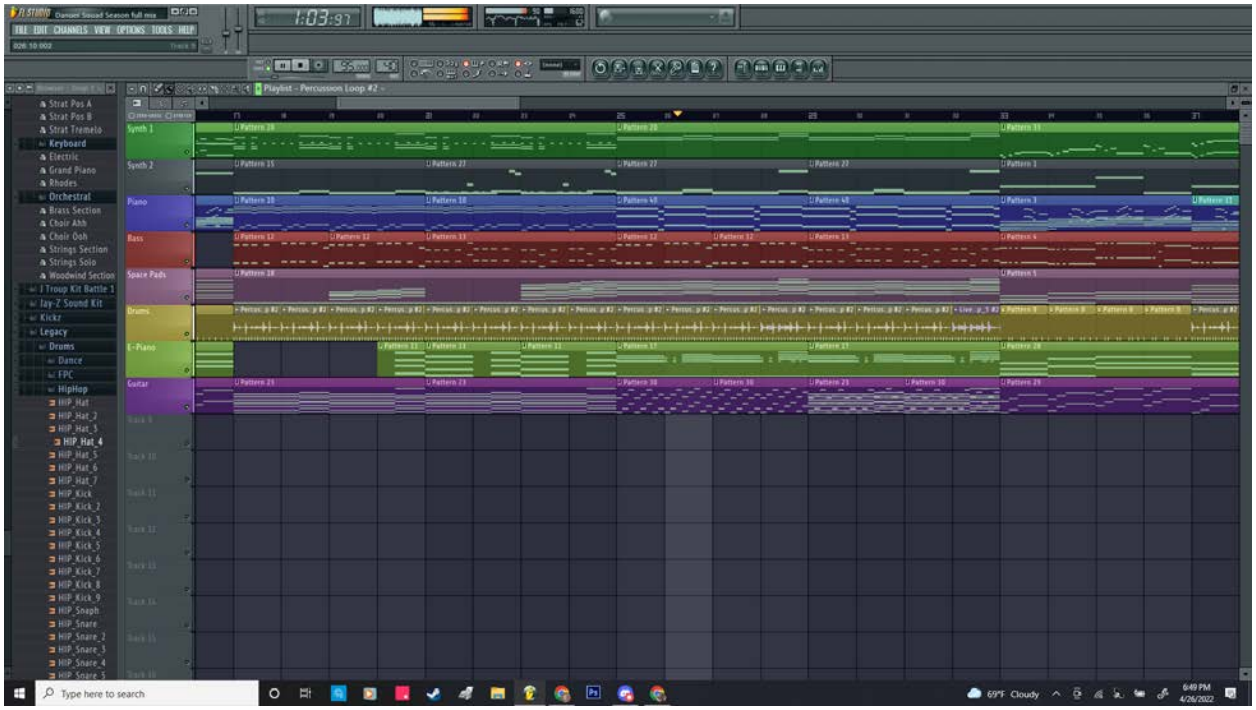

Fig 23: Audio clips screenshot captured from FL Studios 10

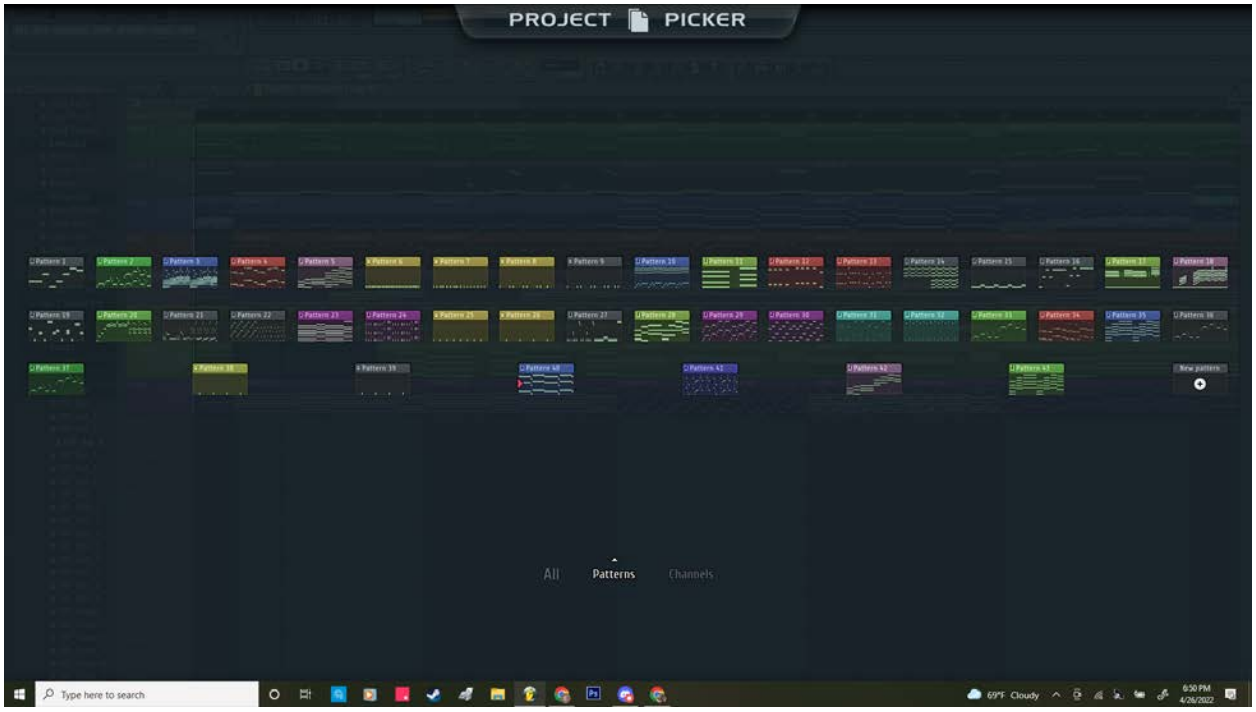

Fig 24: Audio patterns screenshot captured from FL Studios 10

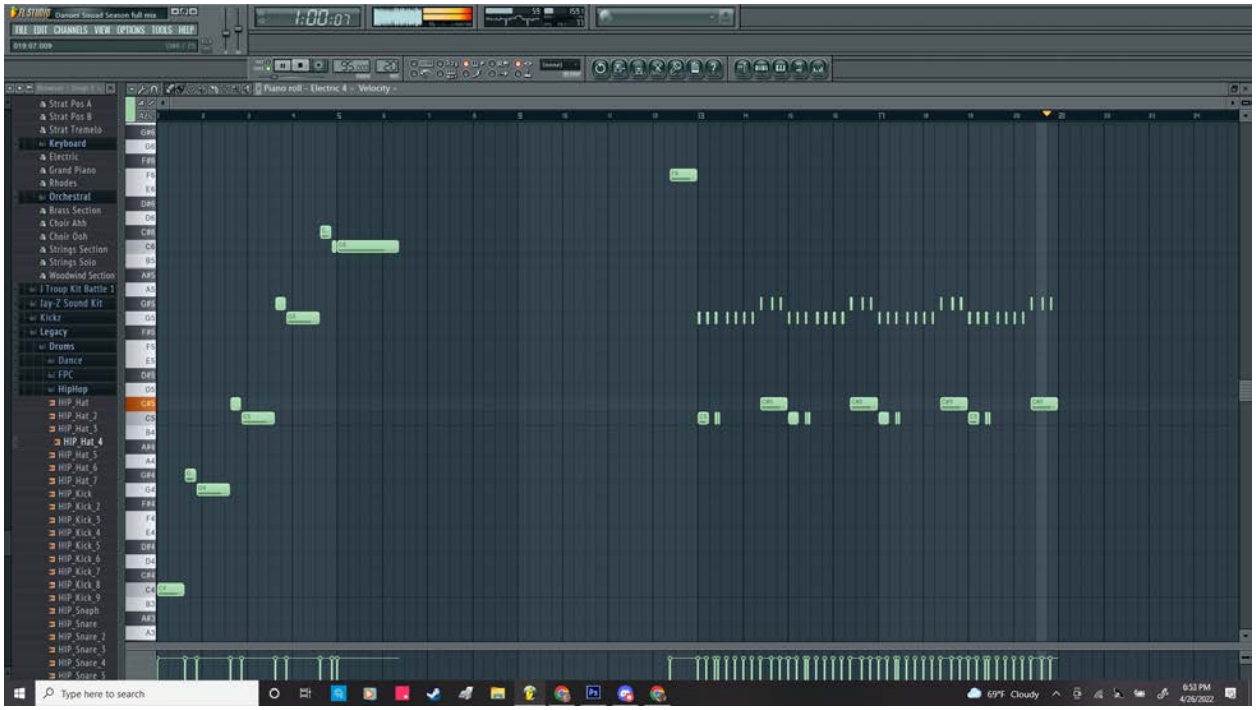

Fig 25: Note construction screenshot captured from FL Studios 10

Fig 26:Note construction part 2 screenshot captured from FL Studios 10

Future Directions

In terms of future development for this project, I want to pursue other Historically Black Colleges and Universities outside of North Carolina. Gather more footage of campus life at Winston-Salem State University. Conduct interviews with the faculty and students to make the video more immersive. I also want to add different subjects to cover, like the academics the university provides in more detail, the various student clubs, or university organizations that are available such as: Student Government, Marching Band, or Academic Scholar groups. The Athletics Programs that are offered, and Greek organizations that are active on said campus, as well as Campus Life that would include daily activities, and hangout spots. Expand the stories to other Historically Black Institutions in North Carolina, and eventually the nation, to build a vast catalog of videos for students to view. Create shorter promotional videos to spread on various social media platforms. There is so much rich history behind these institutions that I believe everyone should take the time to expose themselves to. Knowing what these institutions contribute to society is a very important element everyone needs. A better understanding of culture, and the academic advancements and struggles that challenge people everyday. The biggest take away I am seeking the viewer to gain is a better understanding and appreciation of these institutions, and that they consider to embrace the HBCU experience in person.

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